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# Of wildmen and white men: cryptozoology and inappropriate/d monsters at the cusp of the Anthropocene

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People on the Indonesian island of Halmahera claim that the hairy and barely human giants that are said to roam the jungle are seventeenth-century Portuguese colonizers. Employing the feminist concept of 'inappropriate/d', I show how the appropriation of the Portuguese wildman into village narratives, regional political history, and national development plans as well as into global discourses of science and media in each case inappropriately collapses the boundaries that the white wildman is implicated in maintaining: those between human and animal, the colonial sovereign and 'the primitive native', cryptozoology and the politics of the real. The wild-yet-Western figure, I argue, is inappropriate/d – is 'on the loose' – across local, regional, and global registers of reality in ways that trouble linear histories of the wildman as fading from reality into allegory. Like so many other monsters of the Anthropocene, the truthlikeness, or verisimilitude, of the white wildman is enhanced rather than attenuated by recent turns in politics and media.

'If someone is really ignorant, people will say about that person: "he is like the *yawas*" (*in laisa kapat yawas na*)'.[1] Sepnat fingered the cigarette he had just rolled:

> The *yawas* are people from the deepest parts of the forest (*smat ailoló molang*). And it is true: they know nothing. They do not know how to talk. They do not know how to make clothes and they wander the forest naked. They do not know how to make fire. So, they eat their food raw. But they still try to steal fire and tobacco from village hunters who camp in the forest.

Sepnat lit his cigarette with a plastic lighter:

> Why, the *yawas* do not even know how to throw stones with their hands. Instead, they use their huge feet to 'kick' river boulders (*gela pat*) at people and prey. This is their most important weapon. The stones can be enormous – the size of a football – so you really have to be careful. The *yawas* are gigantic, you know. Much bigger than you.

Sepnat wrinkled his nose in my direction:

> They look like you. They have long hair and claws like an animal (*laisá aiwani na*), but they are white (*bubuláng*) like Westerners. Some even have blue eyes. Their faces look like the faces of Western people (*smat barat*), because they *are* Westerners. They come from Portugal.


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In the Indonesian province of North Maluku, people claim that the large, naked wildmen who roam the forests of Halmahera are Portuguese colonialists. They are not descendants of Portuguese colonizers. Rather, and strikingly, they are the surviving – albeit degenerate animal-like and, as we shall see, also almost spirit-like – members of the contingent of Portuguese soldiers who were vanquished by the Dutch in the early seventeenth century. Known regionally as *biri-biri* and called *yawas* in the village of Buli where I have conducted fieldwork since 1991, these white wildmen are easily the most primitive of all humans: cryptic and spirit-like beings who have been conserved in time by the tropical forest in which they have been hiding for centuries, forfeiting all aspects of their humanity in the process. The *yawas* speak no language and possess no weapons or tools. They wear no clothes and are unable to make fire. In most respects, the *yawas* are not humans at all (*smat ci pa*); they are more 'like animals' (*laisá aiwani na*). And yet these bipedal wildmen are also Westerners (*smat barat*). In a region of Indonesia that used to be known as the Spice Islands and that was colonized for centuries by various European powers as they sought to control the trade in cloves and nutmeg (Andaya 1993), the first white colonizers are also the ultimate figure of animality.

This article explores the political cryptozoology of the white wildman in North Maluku, an archipelagic province of eastern Indonesia with a population of roughly 1 million, 80 per cent of whom are Muslim, with the remaining 20 per cent being Christian. The white wildman is anthropologically interesting because he allows for a reading across two bodies of literature. On the one hand, the composite nature of the *yawas* (both wild and white) collapses two kinds of 'xeno-graphy' – two forms of anthropological study of the foreign – that have tended to remain separate, namely the study of the 'wildman' (Forth 2008; Taussig 1987; White 1972) and the study of the colonial 'whiteman' (Bashkow 2006; Basso 1979; Stoller 1995). Poised somewhere between cryptozoology and political history, the *yawas* is, on the other hand, also an interesting illustration of the close and fraught entanglement between animality and power, the primitive and the political, the unreal and the real. As such, the white wildman sets up the beginning of a conversation between cryptozoology – 'the study of the evidence for animals that are undescribed by science' (Hurn 2017*b*: 1) – and the multispecies study of politics. Attention to the multispecies aspects of politics was initiated in the early 2000s by Jacques Derrida's seminars on what he called 'the troubling resemblance' between the monstrous beast (defined as the human-turned-animal) and the political sovereign in European thought (Derrida 2009: 18). If cryptozoology describes those beastly monsters (wildmen, snowmen, dragons, and other 'cryptids') that hide beyond the margins of the real as defined by Western science and *Realpolitik* (Heuvelmans 1995; Hurn 2017*a*), Derrida highlighted how Western thinking about politics as the domain of the real is nevertheless haunted by these unreal beasts. Indeed, at least since Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), political theory has been troubled by the resemblance between the monstrous beast and the sovereign: '[I]t is like a coupling, an ontological, onto-zoo-anthropo-theologico-political copulation: the beast becomes the sovereign who becomes the beast' (Derrida 2009: 18). In Western political thought, Derrida points out, the beast and the ruler share an essential characteristic: they are both outside of the law. The animal is 'beneath' the law while the sovereign is 'above' it (Wolfe 2013). What Derrida calls a 'logic of the supplement' lurks at the core of the European sovereign-beast: the beast is a 'something' which is simultaneously 'an addition' and 'a substitute' to the sovereign (Derrida 2008 [1972]: xiii). This produces in European political thinking a disturbing analogy between the animal and the ruler


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(Derrida 2009: 14) – an analogy that calls up the frightening and monstrous possibility of the perversion of the order of political power by its own brutish nature (see also Daston & Park 2001: 173-214).

The *yawas* is similarly a supplementary being in eastern Indonesia. On the one hand, the white man is 'something extra', a secondary aspect of the wild man. On the other hand, the powerful whiteman is folded into the animal wildman as his 'real' origin. In the white wildman, 'difference itself is the origin' (Deutscher 2005: 40). But the supplementary logic is part of a different political ontology in eastern Indonesia than in Western Europe. Rather than being, as in Europe, the epistemological and moral problem of sovereignty – power's attending ghost – the wild human beast is in Halmahera the embodied afterlife of the foreign sovereign. If the supplementary logic of power in European political thought is tied to anxieties about the beast within the sovereign, the supplementary logic of power in eastern Indonesia explores the possibilities of the foreign sovereign within the beastly other. This potential is characterized by the dynamic multiplicity and constant transformative possibility that drives animism here, as in other parts of the world (Viveiros de Castro 2013). The eastern Indonesian white-sovereign-wildman shows us an Austronesian political theory as well as a recent global history infused with the potentiality of animist thought. Marshall Sahlins and James Fox have argued that the elementary figure of the Austronesian political imagination is the 'stranger-king' (Fox 2008; Sahlins 2008). Following Tim Ingold's (2006) injunction to allow animism to reanimate anthropological theory, I suggest that the white wildman is an interesting refraction of this political ontology, because it allows an analytical glimpse into the more-than-human politics of a world in which animals – as well as Westerners – may be both kings and spirits.

When I ask people in North Maluku what kind of beings the *yawas* are, they are often at a loss. The *yawas* are of human descent, and yet they are 'not human' (*smat ci pa*). They behave 'like an animal' (*laisa aiwani na*) but they are also not really animals. They have the eyes of Westerners but they wear their hair long like the animist ancestors of Buli people. The *yawas* is hard to define. It is a rogue sovereign who has transformed into a primitive beast. This beast both is and is not an animal (see Willerslev 2004). Indeed, the *yawas* is an animal 'gone rogue' as much as it is a rogue sovereign (see Derrida 2005: 94). It is an animal 'who does not even respect the law of the animal community' (Derrida 2009: 19). Nothing is 'proper' to the rogue animals called beasts, Derrida argues. The beast escapes an ontology of presence because it does not properly belong to any taxonomy and therefore cannot 'be' in any simple sense (2009: 140). Excess marks its monstrous nature.

Cryptic beings are always monstrous by definition. As Stephanie Turner notes in her history of cryptozoology, the 'term "cryptid" is a relative newcomer to the English lexicon, coined as recently as 1983 to take the place of 'sensational and often misleading terms like "monster"' (2017: 12). A monster is necessarily cryptic: enigmatic, concealed, camouflaged.[2] The *yawas* is cryptic through and through: a Westerner concealed within a wildman who hides in the forest. This makes the *yawas* spirit-like as much as he is animal-like and Westerner-like. Some Buli people speculate that their long association with the spirits of the forest have turned the *yawas* into spirits of sorts. 'Maybe that is why one encounters them so rarely', people will sometimes reason. But then the *yawas* is not quite a spirit either, for his presence is physically embodied in a way that spirits are not. To Sepnat and other people in North Maluku, the *yawas* is simultaneously more-than-human, more-than-animal, more-than-spirit, and more-than-Other. It is


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a figure of indeterminate multiplicity. In this monstrosity, following Donna Haraway (1992), lies a certain analytical promise: namely the promise of a more-than-human political analysis in which humans and nonhumans of many kinds are all made to figure. The *yawas* is a *topos* where cryptozoology becomes political and where politics becomes cryptozoological.[3]

## Verisimilitude and the promise of monsters

Inspired by the feminist thinker Trinh Minh-ha (1986/7; 1989), Haraway (1992) suggests that monsters are 'inappropriate/d others'. Inappropriate/d beings do not fit into taxonomic categories but still stand in a critical relationship to them: appropriated and inappropriate at the same time. In the unstable internalization of that which cannot be internalized lies the analytical 'promise of monsters', because inappropriate/d others allow for a diffracted analysis of power: 'a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection, or reproduction' (Haraway 1992: 300). Trinh Minh-ha's analysis sought to capture the positioning of Third World women and other human subjects as inappropriate/d within dominant Western narratives of identity and politics. The inappropriate/d respond to their appropriation, she suggested, 'with at least two/four gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at' (Trinh 1986/7: 9). These responses operate, one might say, on the logic of the supplement: claims to identity that both originate in and lead back to difference. Haraway, in her analysis, seeks to extend this *taxon*-bending quality of the subaltern woman to other forms of life, namely 'organic and technological non-humans' (1992: 300). She does so in order to highlight the 'artifactuality' of the processes of techno-science through which 'nature for us is *made*, as both fiction and fact' (1992: 297, italics in the original), and her research is replete with artifactual and inappropriate/d forms of nature: cyborgs, onco-mice, companion species like dogs, and other embodied 'compounds of the organic, technical, mythic, textual, and political' (1992: 42; see also Haraway 1991; 1997; 2003).

I propose to extend the notion of 'the inappropriate/d' another step: to take it from 'organic and technological others' into cryptozoological others, beings that occupy the imaginary margins of biological and zoological science. Doing so entails a particular intervention into multispecies ethnography and its attempt to decentre the anthropocentrism of conventional political analysis (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Massumi 2014; Shukin 2009). I argue that the multispecies study of animals (and other biological nonhumans) urgently needs such a cryptozoological complement. For if multispecies ethnography restricts its notions of nonhumans to the biological (and the technological), the cryptic nonhumans slip out of focus. Multispecies ethnography thereby risks tying itself to a secular distinction between real and imaginary, a component part of the anthropocentrism that the multispecies turn otherwise critiques. Multispecies ethnography needs wildmen in order to understand the ghosts and monsters of the contemporary world (Tsing, Swanson, Gan & Bubandt 2017). The possibility that white wildmen might be spirits – like the possibility that mountains might be alive, that forests might think, or that volcanoes might be snakes (Bubandt 2017*b*; de la Candena 2015; Kohn 2013; Povinelli 2016) – opens up an analytical path to a wilder Anthropocene beyond the modern secular. The Anthropocene – the epoch in which humans have arguably become a transforming force of nature (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill 2007) – is not a calm, rational world, nor is it a world


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of human mastery (Latour 2017). Rather, it is a strangely animated world (Weston 2017), a world of ghosts and monsters (Tsing *et al.* 2017). Think of robot seals and jellyfish blooms, think of how the factory chicken became the world's most common bird while common bees are vanishing, or think of the global proliferation of the chytrid fungus and the accompanying extinction crisis of amphibians. Such strange animations suggest an Anthropocene topology that is a transect of uncanny valleys (Bubandt 2018), human-made trenches populated by beings and entities whose composite biological-technological-political-ecological nature makes them uncanny. The Halmaheran white wildman is a denizen of these uncanny valleys, a monster at the cusp of the Anthropocene.

Haraway's investigation of the inappropriate/d monster is 'science-fictional' (1992: 300), a deconstruction of the way natural facts are made in scientific labs through practices and narratives that are both fictional and real. My examination of the *yawas* here is 'cryptozoological', an ethnography of the way in which cryptic beings discarded as fictional may still irrupt back into the politics and science of the real. Haraway's notion of artifactuality seeks to 'unblind us' to the way that nature is produced – scientifically, technologically, and politically – in multispecies relationships (1992: 297). By extension, I argue that the notion of 'verisimilitude' can help us trace the ways in which cryptic creatures who inhabit the domain of the unreal, of myth, of 'primitive superstition', may still come to occupy the domain of reality in a globally mediated world of politics and science. In literary theory, verisimilitude describes the rhetorical means through which fiction becomes 'believable' (Buchanan 2010: 481). Verisimilitude was also famously part of the logical positivism of Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper (1963). Popper argued that since it was impossible to ensure that a scientific hypothesis was objectively true, science had to rely on the ability of the scientific community to objectively evaluate the 'truthlikeness' or verisimilitude of any hypothesis. Whatever theory had the most 'truthlikeness' had to be taken as the truth until a theory with better verisimilitude came along (Zwart 2010). Even though Popper's notion of verisimilitude was part of a positivist science that continued to rely heavily on naïve notions of truth, it still highlighted how scientific facts and truth are rhetorical gestures towards the real within a particular genre and moved the metaphysics of 'truth' from a representational to a consensual ideal. Verisimilitude enables a more-than-human analysis of politics by making it possible to trace how cryptic beings – much like organic and technological nonhumans – are made to count as real when they are made central to a *Realpolitik*, to the politics of the real and the realistic. This article follows how the inclusion of the *yawas* into discourses of media, science, and politics increased his verisimilitude and allowed the mythical wildman to enter, ambivalently, into the domain of the real. The wildman, as we shall see, became more truthlike as he was installed into modern authoritative genres of the real: media accounts, scientific discovery, and state statistics. Ironically, the wildman acquired this new verisimilitude in regional politics and global media over the same period of time in the early 2000s when his existence was becoming increasingly implausible in villages across Halmahera. My analysis of the inappropriate/d wildman falls into three parts, called Inappropriate/d 1, 2 & 3.

## Inappropriate/d 1: The traditional death of the last wildman

Sepnat's account of the *yawas* took place in 2004 in Buli, a coastal and predominantly Protestant village on the east coast of Halmahera.[4] I had accompanied Lingoro to the house of Laskap on an errand of tradition (*adat*) that particular afternoon. Laskap


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and Lingoro were ritual representatives or 'prows' (*seselá*) of the two families of a young couple about to get married. As Buli custom requires, the groom had moved into the house of his future in-laws some months earlier to perform bride service for them, a period known as 'tough rowing service' (*kangelá re dao*). During a petty argument, the groom had spoken the name of his future father-in-law. This was a serious breach of ritual etiquette. Like other villages on the island of Halmahera, Buli was historically subject to one of the North Malukan sultanates of Ternate and Tidore until their formal power was abolished by the Dutch colonial government in the early twentieth century. Although formally subservient to the sultanate of Tidore, Buli tribute payment and labour also shaped a cultural self-image as fearless male guardians of the symbolically superior but effeminate sultanate of Tidore. Buli marriage rituals replicate this symbolic asymmetry: the bride's family are the female overlord of the groom's family. As a member of the symbolically inferior male side, the groom had seriously violated good manners by addressing his in-laws by name. A compensatory fine had been paid, and that afternoon the bride's family headed by Lingoro had arrived to reciprocate (*fasíma*) the fine with a counter-prestation of ten porcelain plates.

Traditional ceremonies are always facilitated by polite talk that 'caresses' (*safsáyaf*) one's ritual partner rhetorically to establish an atmosphere of pleasant conviviality. Lingoro was a shrewd and eloquent ritual leader frequently employed as a ritual 'prow' by other families. I think he liked to have me along on these occasions because I was also a convenient prop for him. In this part of Indonesia, Westerners embody a fascinating strangeness that make them perfect devices with which to rhetorically 'caress' one's ritual counterpart. I had come to expect that Lingoro would ask me something about the West, and I had therefore prepared an appropriately strange story about frostbite during a cold Danish winter. My story led into a string of questions about the West in general before turning to the issue of farming. Amidst expressions of astonishment as we iterated, one by one, the many plants in Buli gardens that would not grow in Europe, Sepnat brought up the topic of the *yawas* wildmen. Given the Western origin of these wildmen, the flow of our conversation from Danish frostbite via the absence of tropical plants in Europe to the *yawas* was not a change of topic at all: the weirdness of the West and the mystery of the Halmaheran wildman were branches of the same alterity, similar forms of otherness that, if properly placed in ritual discourse, served to bolster the power of tradition.

Sepnat's account of the *yawas* prompted an interjection by Laskap, our host from the groom's side. Eager to contribute to the narrative of agreeable difference, Laskap proclaimed that his father-in-law, Gura, had killed a *yawas* during a hunting trip in the 1930s. Gura had found the *yawas* fishing on the upper reaches of the river of Semlós. The *yawas* had stood immobile in the river, peering into the water. In a sudden flash, the hairy giant had lunged into the river and emerged with a large fish, the size of a man's arm. The wildman had then proceeded to devour the fish raw. 'The *yawas* are tremendously strong', Laskap added for my benefit, 'they can snap tree trunks like twigs and easily outpace even the fastest hunter when they ascend the ravines that traverse the forest'. Gura therefore knew he had to be careful. He immediately murmured the name of his animal guardian spirit (*suang*), summoning it to protect him and make him invisible. As the *yawas* unsuspectingly relished the fish, Gura threw his spear from his place of hiding, hitting the hairy giant squarely in the chest and killing him on the spot. Too big to carry back to the village, the body of the wildman was left by Gura to


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rot in the river. 'Perhaps', Laskap concluded his story, 'that was the last *yawas*. I do not think anyone has seen one since then'.

If Gura had killed the last *yawas*, he was a fitting person to have done so. Forty years after his death, he remained an iconic figure in living Buli memory. A great warrior, who had often proven his fighting abilities in skirmishes with the Tobelo, the traditional enemies of Buli people, Gura was also a ritual leader (*oku*). As such, he led traditional rituals to appease the spirits and functioned as an arbiter in marriage negotiations, such as the one that we all attended that afternoon. Laskap's invocation of Gura, a common forefather to most of the men gathered that day in 2004 to negotiate a matter of tradition, was therefore eminently appropriate. The story of how Gura killed the wildman served to validate tradition. Or did it?

## What Gura killed

There is one notable exception to the bestiality of the white wildman in North Maluku, one singular characteristic that marks him as more human than animal: the *yawas* are said to be knowledgeable about fighting magic (*man de wela*). Tangkea, another of the men in the group, was the next to speak: 'The *yawas* see themselves as the enemies of humans. If they meet a hunter in the forest, they will point to the sun and then to the ground'. As a form of language, this might not be much, but to Tangkea and the others that afternoon the meaning was still clear, as if enhanced by the absence of words: 'Sun and earth: on this day, you die'. It was a threat and a curse in one gesture. Albeit unspoken, it was uncannily similar to the murmured spells that Buli hunters themselves use when they encounter a danger. These spells form part of the compendium of fighting magic that Buli people – like other groups in Halmahera – claim as a central aspect of their traditional identity and which enabled Buli people to be the local protectors of the Tidore sultanate. It was also this magic, called 'a little something extra' (*fa paisá*), that gave Gura the ability to slay the *yawas*, its own brand of 'wild' fighting magic notwithstanding.

Fighting magic is the domain of men in Halmahera. Indeed, the word for fighting magic in Buli is 'right-hand male' (*man de wela*). This magic comes from the supreme ancestor known as Íyan Toa. Emerging as a baby from a palm tree rather than being born, Íyan Toa grew with unusual speed to become a warrior who killed all Buli enemies but disappeared in disgust when his Buli adoptive parents dissuaded him from also killing all the women and children of the enemy. Before disappearing, however, Íyan Toa surrendered to his adoptive father the two important tree roots that now constitute Buli fighting magic (Bubandt 2014: 123). Íyan Toa is the embodiment of what Haraway calls 'masculinist self-birthing' (1992: 299) and all the magic that such self-creation holds. But in a troubling sense there is little to distinguish the male exclusiveness of Íyan Toa, the Buli culture hero, from the wildman, their sworn enemy, for the white wildman is entirely masculine, too. During a pause in Laskap's account, Lingoro noted that there seemed to be no female *yawas*. The other men agreed: there were no female *yawas*. All *yawas* were men. In a strange turn of symbolic logic, the same narrative that recruited the wildman to do the ritual work of soothing tradition also forced everyone that afternoon to contemplate the uncanny similarity between Gura and what he had killed.

If Gura and the wildman were uncannily similar in life, their deaths were also disturbingly congruous. The death of the *yawas* at the hands of Gura came at the very historical moment in the 1930s when Buli animist tradition was under increasing


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pressure from Christianity and direct Dutch colonial rule. Gura had been one of the most ardent opponents of the Dutch missionaries from the Utrecht Mission Union, and although he had finally converted to Christianity in 1972, he had instructed his children that he wanted his dead body to be placed on a wooden platform (*faga*) like his animist forefathers rather than being buried in the manner of the new religion. The story of the last wildman was, for the men assembled that afternoon in 2004, also the bittersweet story of one of the last traditional animists. The story marked the end of real tradition as much as the end of the wildman. The traditional man and the wild man were equally 'out of time' in a modern world (I. *dunia modern*), a world of religion (I. *dunia beragama*), and a world of progress (I. *kemajuan*). As Laskap pointed out:

> Today we have electricity and TVs and satellite dishes. The mining company will soon begin to operate on Pakal Island, and we are becoming independent because of the new district. Therefore, there are no *yawas* left. They are not 'in keeping with the times' (I. *tidak cocok dengan zaman*).

For Laskap, 'the times' equalled modernity (I. *zaman modern*). But 'modern time' was less a reference to the present than to an imagined subjunctive future. Laskap himself had no TV and no satellite dish. Revenues from the nickel mine that had opened in the area in 1997 still seemed to disappear into the hands of local government officials (Bubandt 2006), and the process of political decentralization had yet to show any signs that it would benefit people like Laskap. 'Modern time' was in that sense a 'future time' (Cheah & Guerlac 2009). In this future time, the past had no proper place. Therefore, there could be no wildmen left. But the passing of the *yawas* articulated the passing of tradition, too. Gura and the *yawas* were part of a time that had passed with the imminent arrival of the future, the modern age. In this coming age, men of the wild and men of tradition were equally impossible, were no longer 'in keeping with the times'. If anything, Gura belonged more to the past than did the wildman he had killed. The *yawas* was a wild 'man of the forest' (*orang hutan* in Indonesian). As such, he belonged emphatically to the primitive past. However, the 'forest man' was also a 'foreigner' (I. *orang asing*) and a 'Westerner' (I. *orang barat*), and as such, he was of the future. For many Indonesians, in particular for Christian Indonesians such as people in Buli, the West (I. *Barat*) is the chief icon of modernity (Bubandt 2004). In communities across Indonesia, discourses about a putative 'elsewhere' are central to the political imagination, and here the West and its associate modernity is often a master trope (Nourse 1999; Rutherford 2003; Spyer 2000; Tsing 1993; Wiener 1995). In part at least, this iconic status of 'the West' is a trickle-down effect of Indonesian high modernism, cultivated during three decades of New Order developmentalism (Franke 1972; Heryanto 1988). This has laid the foundations for what Michael Taussig has called 'a third-world cult of the modern' (1987: 278). Science, rational planning, modern medicine, and social engineering have all assumed hegemonic status in Indonesia (Li 2007; Mrázek 2002), and these aspects of 'the modern' are desirable. The global boom in pious forms of religion, Muslim as well as Christian, has meant that many Indonesians today decry the moral depravity of the West. Still, to most Indonesians the West retains a magical appeal as the encapsulation of the modern. The *yawas* is a short-circuit in the temporality of this cult of the modern, a trickster to the modernity-tradition divide that organizes this temporality. He is the ultimate primitive, a figure of the past frozen in time. But his white skin and Western origin are also 'of the future', suffused with the power of modernity. On that afternoon in Buli in 2004, the *yawas* therefore also undermined the modernity-tradition divide he was called upon to affirm.


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## Inappropriate/d 2: The cosmo-politics of the wildman

Some ten years before our conversation in 2004, Lingoro had told me the following story of how the Portuguese had come to be wildmen in the first place:

> The Portuguese were the first Europeans to rule in North Maluku. After a while, however, the Dutch arrived. In order to decide who would rule in North Maluku, the Dutch challenged the Portuguese to a contest to see who was the fastest to build a fortress (*benteng*). They both agreed to compete to build a fortress in just one night. Whoever had the most complete castle by morning would win the right to rule. The Portuguese, who were most numerous, were confident and took on the wager. At dusk, both parties began to build. The Dutch began work on their castle called 'Benteng Oranje', while the Portuguese began work on their own castle down the coast. Realizing that they were losing, the Dutch captain came up with a plan. He ordered his men to erect a large wooden scaffolding, between which they suspended the sails from their ships. The next morning, the Portuguese fortress was still far from finished. But in the faint light of dawn, the Portuguese saw in the distance what they thought was a finished Dutch fortress. Deeply ashamed (*mai*) by their defeat, the Portuguese decided to withdraw. Never realizing that they had been tricked, they crossed the narrow sound between Ternate and Halmahera, where they disappeared into the forest and became *yawas*.

This origin story sets the *yawas* apart from other wildmen in the catalogue of cryptic hominoids in Indonesia and Asia (Coleman & Huyghe 1999; Forth 2008). It is, as far as I know, the only example of a 'degenerate' wildman with a Western colonial background.[5] In this story, cryptozoology becomes a political history about the excesses of colonial power and of the wildmen it produces (Taussig 1987). This history follows a classical regional template for many myths of power. In this part of the world where the Indian Ocean meets the Western Pacific, myths often recount how power is won through deceit by a 'stranger-king' and how the loss of power is closely entangled with shame and disappearance (Fox 1995). James Fox calls the narrative about strangeness and power 'an epistemic Austronesian cultural theme' about origins and political legitimacy (2008: 201), while Marshall Sahlins sees in the 'stranger-king' – a figure from a distant land who comes to be ruler – one of the 'elementary forms of the politics of life' in the Asia-Pacific region (2008: 177).[6] The notion of the 'stranger-king', one might say, grows from 'cosmo-politics', a politics that is always-already cosmological (Graeber & Sahlins 2017). The origin story of the Portuguese wildman is a counterpoint to this cosmo-politics. While the heroic narratives of the stranger-king focus on the installation of the powerful outsider on the inside, the account of the *yawas* is the story of the political loser. When the Dutch wrested colonial power from the Portuguese, the defeated 'stranger-king' retreated shamefully into the forest to become a bestial 'stranger-wildman'. In this transformation from outside-ruler to inside-wildman there is also a shift from visible to invisible, from human to animal, a shift that makes good sense in the animist logic that informs the communities of North Maluku despite their parallel allegiance to either Islam or Christianity. There is power in the forest, and in the human-like animals and spirits that dwell there.

## Disappearance and unruly returns

The waters between North Maluku and West Papua are full of stories about powerful figures – mythical and historical – who assume a spirit-like form and disappear after promising to return. The account of the Buli ancestor Íyan Toa, recounted in part above, concludes with him disappearing into the smoke of a burning fire to become the supreme guardian spirit, promising to return in times of trouble. In the early nineteenth century, the last ruler of the Halmaheran sultanate, Jailolo, similarly disappeared into the forests after an unsuccessful attack on the Dutch. For a century, expectations about the


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return of this absent sultan fuelled a succession of rebellions against Dutch sovereignty (Bubandt 2014). The narrative plot of defeat, disappearance, and the promise of return transforms political history into political manifesto, changing a political model *of* into a political model *for* (Geertz 1973: 93). Perhaps the best-known narrative of this kind is found in the accounts that motivate the millenarian cults of coastal western Melanesia (Worsley 1970 [1957]), an area with close historical connections to the sultanates of North Maluku (Bubandt 2014; Kamma 1972; Rutherford 2003). The West Papuan myth about the old man Manarmaker ('The Old, Itchy Man') concerns disappearance and return in just this way; it also concerns the magic of a white-skinned sovereign concealed within a disregarded figure. One day, the myth recounts, Manarmaker acquired magical power from the Morning Star, but the disease-ridden old man was resentfully evicted from his community after he had magically impregnated a local princess. As a result, Manarmaker fled to the West. En route however, the old man shed his disease-ridden skin and transformed into a handsome man (often also represented as a white-skinned person) with the name Mansren ('The Clean/Perfect Man'). Before his departure, Mansren promised to return to usher in an age of plenty without illness or death (Worsley 1970 [1957]: 136-40). The myth of Manarmaker, a story of how the most despised of figures contains as its real essence the Other as a powerful remainder, has informed Papuan societies for a century and remains critical to their political resistance movement against Indonesian rule (Kirksey 2012; Rutherford 2012).

In the Papuan story of Manarmaker, the ancestor and the white Other are One within a redemptive politics of millenarianism. In the North Malukan story of the *yawas*, the white outsider is embodied in the local primitive within a variant kind of politics where colonial and postcolonial subjects regularly become spirits. Although the *yawas* is unique among Asian wildmen in having a Western origin, he resembles other spirit-like Westerners who roam the forests of eastern Indonesia. On the island of Batanta in West Papua, the *bakantare* are a group of spirit-like beings who inhabit the most inaccessible jungle ravines. Looking and dressing like Westerners, they live in modern but invisible cities which they may reveal to village hunters. After a visit, the hunter is returned to his human village by the *bakantare* but is invariably unable to relocate the site of the *bakantare* city. The *moro* are a similar kind of forest beings – half-spirit, half-human – on the island of Halmahera in North Maluku. The *moro* are small and able to make themselves invisible at will. Some of these 'disappearing people' (I. *orang hilang*), as the *moro* are known in Indonesian, are indigenous to North Maluku. They are said to be subjects of the Sultan of Jailolo and to have disappeared with him into the forest during the sixteenth century after being defeated by the Dutch. Alternatively, they are said to be the original inhabitants of a vanished kingdom on the island of Morotai. These inhabitants converted to Catholicism but disappeared and turned into spirits during a violent revolt against the Portuguese in the 1570s (Haire 1981: 106). But not all *moro* are autochthonous. In fact, most appear to be foreign. All of the powers that have historically fought and lost in the region – the Spanish and Portuguese during the sixteenth century as well as the Japanese during the Second World War – have left *moro* spirits behind. These *moro* are said to have built large cities at the bottom of lakes, complete with highways, universities, and all manner of technological equipment (Ishige 1980). The *moro* can become powerful spirit allies for a variety of purposes, ranging from traditional medicine to modern politics. Indeed, a former head of the district of North Halmahera was said to use the *moro* to bolster his political career. But spirit alliances with the *moro* can be dangerous. The *moro* are, for their own reasons,


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attracted to humans and seek to entice people into the forest by assuming alluring forms and inviting people to have sex with them. While the acceptance of these sexual offers will give one a spirit ally, *moro* solicitations are fraught with danger because one runs the risk of becoming *moro* oneself and being doomed to a life in invisible seclusion from other humans.

The *yawas* have none of this magical potential: no person in Buli has struck a deal with, married, or received a gift of magic from the white wildmen. In their resolute negation of sociality, the *yawas* are more similar to yet another class of strange white men who hide in the forest, namely the feared head-hunters. Head-hunters, real and imagined, have haunted communities across eastern Indonesia for centuries (Barnes 1993; Drake 1989). During the 1990s, some particularly elusive head-hunters were reported to be of Western origin. Dressed in military uniform, they were allegedly paid by the Indonesian government to procure human heads for development projects (Tsing 1993). These white head-hunters also haunted Buli in the 1990s. But in the last ten years, these elusive figures appear to have changed tactics across Indonesia: instead of taking heads, they have begun to steal organs. This shift in *modus operandi* has caused widespread rumour panics in cities across eastern Indonesia and been widely reported in Indonesian media. The result has been a dramatic shift in the ontological status of these head-hunters: integrated into authoritative accounts of the real, they have moved from the realm of cultural imagination and local myth to the realm of ominous reality and political concern (Bubandt 2017*a*). The *yawas*, strikingly, have undergone a similar shift in recent times, their verisimilitude dramatically augmented by their awkward appropriation within authoritative accounts of the real.

### Inappropriate/d 3: Wildness within bureaucratic reason

'So, you are going to Buli!' Bahar Andili, the district head of Central Halmahera, was perusing my research permit. It was 1991 and the beginning of my first fieldwork. I had come to Andili's office in Tidore at the end of a three-week expedition through the Indonesian bureaucratic system to get official approval for my research project. But the district head was not happy about my decision to focus on Buli. 'Have you heard of the *biri-biri*?', he asked rhetorically, before continuing: 'This is what you must study!' *Biri-biri* is the North Malukan term for the wildmen I would later come to know in Buli as *yawas*. Andili leaned back in his leather swivel chair, pausing for dramatic effect. From his reclining position, he tossed my letters of recommendation onto his desk:

> Your research permit is the fourth I have approved, but none of the previous anthropologists have studied the *biri-biri*. I told them what I am telling you now: 'You ought to investigate the *biri-biri*'. After all, *biri-biri* are the original inhabitants of Halmahera. Did you know they descend from the Portuguese? I know this because one of them came out of the forest in the 1970s and ended up in the town of Soa Sio, right here on Tidore. He looked like you a bit, but he was much taller and had long hair. He remained in town for a few days and then returned to the forest. In the forests behind Buli there are still many left.

Bahar Andili was a politician with ambitious dreams. He believed that timber, minerals, and oceanic resources should replace cloves as the main export article. This, he hoped, would rekindle the world's interest in North Maluku and bring development to the region. Forests had to be cleared, train lines constructed, and air traffic expanded. Andili never lived to realize these dreams. He died in 2001 under mysterious circumstances in the aftermath of a violent conflict in North Maluku in which elite figures like Andili himself had played a key role (Bubandt 2006). Still, his dreams were part of the


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bureaucratic reason that in the 1990s would transform the *yawas* from a mythical figure into a statistical fact.

In North Maluku and other marginal places of the Indonesian nation, the policies of New Order rule (from 1966 to 1998) had a strongly civilizing slant (Li 1999). Indigenous people who were isolated (I. *terasing*), 'backward' (I. *terbelakang*), and 'unaware' (I. *belum sadar*) needed to be included within development (Dove 1988). Transmigration, the state-organized relocation of millions of people from Java and other overpopulated areas to the Outer Islands, played an important role in this project. In response to criticism, both international and domestic, as well as an increasingly strong focus on the internal national 'margins', transmigration in the late 1980s moved away from its previous one-dimensional focus on the large-scale movement of people from Java towards a heightened concern to include local transmigrants (I. *translokal*) from 'original populations' (I. *penduduk asli*) within the projects. This adjusted transmigration policy had a particular focus on what it termed 'isolated tribes' (I. *suku terasing*), a cover term for animist hunter-gatherers across Indonesia (Duncan 2004). In Halmahera, the main indigenous group considered 'isolated' and therefore targeted for inclusion within transmigration sites were the Forest Tobelo. As it happens, *asing*, the root of the New Order term for 'isolated' (I. *terasing*), also means 'being foreign'. Being 'isolated' (I. *terasing*) therefore carries the semantic weight of also being literally 'the most foreign' (I. *ter-asing*). The logic that indigenous groups were somehow 'foreign', and therefore posed a threat to the nation, motivated New Order attempts across Indonesia to integrate hunter-gatherers, often by force and intimidation, into the political collective of the nation (Duncan 2001).[7] For New Order politicians in North Maluku, this logic made particular political-semantic sense: the 'isolated' (*ter-asing*) groups of Forest Tobelo had to be identical to the 'foreign' (*asing*) wildman. The supplementarity of the *yawas*, the foreign otherness that was the real origin of the primitive wildmen, became the symbolic reason that drove attempts to domesticate local hunter-gatherers. By the 1980s, the nexus between the 'most foreign' of all wildmen (*biri-biri*) and the 'most isolated' and 'primitive' of all local ethnic groups in Halmahera (*tugutil*) had hardened into statistical truth. Thus in 1987 the regional Bureau of Statistics reported with implausible accuracy that there were 2,116 '*Tugutil Biri-Biri*' and 2,773 '*Tugutil Lino*' in the forests behind Buli (KSKHT 1987: 43).[8] Government statistics made the white wildman a reality in the political landscape of North Maluku and served, in turn, to semantically justify projects of political engineering. During the early 1990s, a series of transmigration sites were established north of Buli, in the region where the '*Tugutil Biri-Biri*' and '*Tugutil Lino*' were allegedly so statistically numerous, all of them focusing on the inclusion of the 'isolated' Forest Tobelo (Bubandt 1999; Duncan 2001).

As projects of political engineering, the transmigration sites on Halmahera failed doubly. They not only entailed extensive destruction of forest and dramatically shrunk the living space of the Forest Tobelo (Duncan 2004), they also failed in their civilizing mission. Only nine families of Forest Tobelo decided to settle in them, and then only for a limited time. Yet something escaped this ecological disaster and political failure: the verisimilitude of the wildman. For the new statistical veracity of the white wildman continued to work its magic outside of government policy. Back in the village of Buli, for instance, local narratives about the *yawas* adjusted to the new source of verisimilitude. On a return visit in 2014, I re-interviewed Sepnat and some of the other older men about the *yawas*. In contrast to their views in 2004, they had now adopted the bureaucratic truth about the *yawas*, claiming that the Portuguese wildman and the Forest Tobelo


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were the same. Bureaucratic dreams and statistics may have failed in their civilizing ambition and caused ecological devastation, but they had an unintended effect on the wildman that they sought to appropriate to their own ends: he became inappropriately real.

## Sticky verisimilitude: the wildman in media and science

The reality effect of the transformation of the *yawas* into a statistical fact is an example, I suggest, of a broader phenomenon; namely the sticky verisimilitude that allows mythical beings and other phenomena of the unbelievable to irrupt into contemporary accounts of the real in global discourses of media, science, and politics. The discovery of *Homo floresiensis* on Flores, some 1,500 kilometres southwest of Halmahera, is another and celebrated example of what I call sticky verisimilitude. In 2004, a team of Australian and Indonesian archaeologists announced that they had uncovered the remains of a new prehistoric species of hominoids (Brown *et al.* 2004). Quickly dubbed the 'hobbits of Flores' in international media, their discovery caused an international stir because it suggested the possibility that these hominoids, possibly related to *Homo habilis* (Argue, Morwood, Sutikna, Jatmiko & Saptomo 2009), had coexisted with modern humans as recently as 17,000 years ago in eastern Indonesia (Aiello 2010). The finding sparked the imagination of world media because it appeared to validate myths among the Nage people of Flores about *ebu gogo* wildmen (BBC 2004; Forth 2008). Perhaps, the reports implied, one would need to take seriously the wildman myths of indigenous groups elsewhere in Indonesia, since these potentially described hitherto ignored sites at which palaeoanthropologists might find more evidence of human ancestors. Mythical wildmen were in other words potentially real. In the process, adventure had been restored to science. 'Get out your shovels', as one physical anthropologist exhorted in the journal *Nature* (Lieberman 2009: 42).

Sticky verisimilitude refers to the way authoritative discourses and practices of science, media, and politics bring into reality cryptic beings and phenomena otherwise discarded as 'mythical', 'superstitious', or 'illusory'. The verisimilitude of the *yawas* is sticky in this way, too. In 1975, global media reported that Indonesian troops had found Teruo Nakamura, a soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army, in the jungle of Morotai, the same island from which the *moro* are said to hail. Nakamura had survived in seclusion in the forest since 1945, refusing to believe that the war had ended (*Time* 1975). For many locals in Halmahera, the discovery of Nakamura, the last of the Japanese army stragglers from the Pacific theatre of war (Trefalt 2003), conferred new legitimacy on the notion that foreigners were hiding, spirit-like, in the jungle.

The sticky verisimilitude of cryptic wildmen in eastern Indonesia troubles the linearity of conventional histories of the wildman. Take, for instance, Hayden White's classic analysis of the history of wildmen in Western thought. In the volume *The wild man within* (1972), he argued that the wildman had vanished from 'the wild' as the world's forests and other natural habitats of the wildman were tamed. Instead, he claimed anthropology and psychology supported the proposition that the wild human being – in its double form of the hairy beast and the Noble Savage – was in reality a discursive trope that expressed the denied essence of the modern mind (see also White 1982). As wild nature was domesticated, the wildman became interiorized, it seemed. Naming this process 'remythification' (1972: 7), White argued that the wildman had shifted from being an exterior concern 'out there in the world' to becoming an interiorized problem, a projection of the repressed anxieties of modern


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self-consciousness. White's historiography is a powerful criticism of modern tropical tropes, but writing in the 1970s he could not have anticipated what would happen in the wake of the anthropogenic disruptions to the world's ecosystems and environment that are sometimes referred to as the Anthropocene. For human attempts to domesticate the world's swamps, forests, mountains, and tundras have failed to eradicate their chthonic monsters. On the contrary, these attempts have called old monsters into life (Haraway 2016; Latour 2017; Stengers 2015). In that sense, the Halmaheran wildman is emblematic of the sticky verisimilitude of monsters in the Anthropocene more generally. The recent historical pathway of the *yawas* has decidedly not been a retreat from the world 'out there' into an interior world of analogy and the imagination. Rather, the sticky verisimilitude of the wildman within government statistics, global rumours of organ theft, and mediated accounts of the discovery of prehistoric remnants or wartime stragglers has revitalized the wildman as having a real existence 'out there' in the ecologically ruined landscapes of failed projects of modernization. An excess to the world of myth, the wildman has become inappropriate/d at the cusp of modern accounts of the real.

## Conclusion

In mathematics, a cusp refers to the point where a curve breaks sharply to begin to move in a new direction. Mathematicians refer to the cusp as a singularity, adding that 'a singularity is invariably a clue' (Bruce & Giblin 1992: i). Monsters sit at the cusp of power: they are part of its curvature and yet also mark a unique interruption of the curve. Therein lies their analytical potential. The *yawas* sits at the cusp of histories of colonialism, modernity, statistical truth, and state development in the same way that its sticky truthlikeness amidst ecological destruction of the forests and government domestication of the villages of Halmahera marks the cusp of an Indonesian version of the Anthropocene.

Political history in eastern Indonesia has for centuries sloughed off wildmen and spirits of Western origin. As global contenders to political control over the region have lost power, they have turned into stranger-wildmen, stranger-spirits, and magical Messiahs – supplementary figures to the stranger-king – within a 'cultural politics of alterity' (Sahlins 2010: 121). This article has been a political ethnography of one of these historical figures-cum-cryptozoological beings, a being that is both an odd wildman and a political oddity. The Portuguese wildman is the inappropriate/d afterlife of the politics of alterity whereby the outsider is installed on the inside. He is an awkward remainder of the power of the stranger-king, and yet he is also more, for the *yawas* is a monster that does not sit still historically (see Musharbash & Presterudstuen 2014). Tracing the history of this wild remainder of power, I have argued that the supplementarity of the white wildman – the way the West and whiteness are folded into his primitive origin – enables the *yawas* to be appropriated by, and inappropriate to, a range of orders and imaginaries on different scales in the jungles, villages, government offices, and media accounts of eastern Indonesia. It is a striking irony that when people in the village of Buli in 2004 declared the last Portuguese wildman to be dead because he did not fit into a modern world of mining and development, the white wildman had for over a decade been spilling over from myth into reality as a statistical and globally mediated fact. The verisimilitude of the *yawas* became awkwardly bolstered by bureaucratic reason and development projects as well as by media accounts at the very juncture of his vanishing from village and forest lifeworlds. The Portuguese wildman,


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as a consequence, is today not a mythical expression of a local cosmology about power in any simple sense. Rather, the white wildman is inappropriate/d within a variety of interlinked stories of the real – government development policies, global media reports about Japanese stragglers, archaeological discoveries of prehistorical hobbits, and rumours of organ thieves – each of which allows new kinds of sticky verisimilitude to adhere to him.

## NOTES

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[1] Words in italics are in Buli language unless otherwise indicated. I. indicates Indonesian.

[2] See the entry on 'cryptic, n. and adj.' in *Oxford English dictionary online* (*http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45358*, accessed 7 February 2019).

[3] The term *yawas* is itself an etymological index of the fantastic. It is a cognate of the Malay word *mawas*, a term used by Malay locals and European travelling scientists in the nineteenth century to describe human-like and 'seemingly fantastic creatures' on the Malaysian peninsula (Forth 2008: 165).

[4] One of the smallest of the sixteen language groups on Halmahera, the Austronesian-speaking Buli people number some 3,000 who live in a handful of villages on the east coast of the island. Subsistence farmers, hunters, and fishermen until recently, Buli people have been thoroughly enveloped in a monetary economy after nickel exploration began in the region in the late 1990s (Bubandt 2014).

[5] But see Brightman (1990) for an account of the association between primitive hairy-chested beings and European fur trappers among the Missinippi Cree of northwestern Manitoba.

[6] The association between strangeness and power is also found in many societies outside of the Austronesian language family (Graeber & Sahlins 2017; Helms 1988).

[7] With the fall of the New Order regime, the term *terasing* was phased out from government programmes and replaced by the more neutral synonym *terpencil* to designate national minorities scheduled for political development (Duncan 2004: 91).

[8] *Lino* is yet another category of white wildman in Halmahera. *Lino*, sometimes also called *Lingkon* or *Lingon*, are said to be descendants of a certain Australian 'Sergeant Lingkon' who was shipwrecked on Halmahera in the 1930s and married a local woman. The group is said to have disappeared into the forests of Halmahera when the Japanese occupied the island in 1942 (see also Duncan 1998: 58).

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## Hommes sauvages et hommes blancs : cryptozoologie et monstres « inappropriés » au tournant de l'Anthropocène

*Résumé*

Les habitants de l'île indonésienne de Halmahera affirment que les géants velus et tout juste humains qu'ils disent hanter la jungle seraient des colons portugais du XVII$^{ème}$ siècle. En utilisant le concept féministe d'*inappropriate/d*, l'auteur montre comment l'appropriation de l'homme sauvage portugais par les récits villageois, l'histoire politique régionale et les plans de développement nationaux, mais aussi les discours mondialisés de la science et des médias, renverse toujours de façon inappropriée les barrières que l'homme sauvage blanc contribue à maintenir : entre humain et animal, entre colon souverain et « natif primitif », entre cryptozoologie et politique du réel. Cette figure sauvage mais occidentale est, selon l'auteur, *inappropriate/d*, « déchaînée », dans les registres locaux, régionaux et mondiaux de la réalité, troublant les histoires linéaires où l'homme sauvage se situe à la transition entre réalité et allégorie. Comme de nombreux autres monstres de l'Anthropocène, la vraisemblance de l'homme sauvage blanc est renforcée, et non pas atténuée, par les évolutions politiques et médiatiques récentes.

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